

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

19 July 2014

Bangladeshi police use water cannon on protesting garment workers

Up to nine garment workers were injured on July 9 when Dhaka police used water cannons, tear gas, birdshot and batons against 500 protestors. The attack occurred while employees from five factories of the Toba Group, the parent company of Tazreen Fashions, were demonstrating at Badda to demand payment of their May and June wages and the Eid bonus.

Tazreen Fashions supplies goods for WalMart. Delwar Hossain, the factory owner, is currently in jail over the deadly fire at a factory in Ashulia in November 2012, which killed 112 workers.

Bangladeshi garment workers walkout over death

On July 9, 20 people were injured when factory authorities tried to stop Southern Design workers in Ashulia striking in protest over the death of Abbas Ali, a fellow employee.

Employees claim that Abbas Ali fell sick while on duty, but was ordered to work overtime until 9 p.m., along with other factory workers. He died later at his Ashulia residence. Fearing further protests the authorities shut down the factory.

Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa municipal workers strike

Lakki Marwat Municipal Committee employees in Pakistan's north-west province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa walked off the job on July 11 and demonstrated over the non-payment of three months salaries and pensions. It was the second time in two weeks that they have protested over the issue.

A Local Government Employees Federation official said that the union had held several meetings with the provincial minister for local bodies and other local government officials during the last month for release of salary and pension funds, but to no avail.

India: Kochi private bus drivers strike

On July 15, workers of around 550 private buses in Kochi, in India's southern state of Kerala struck for 24 hours to demand a 50 percent pay rise and improved safety. The Private Bus Workers Coordination

Committee (PBWCC), representing drivers, conductors and cleaners, said that the drivers only received 640 rupees (\$US10.64) a day and were forced to remain on duty through their meal breaks. Other drivers in the industry are paid 790 rupees a day and are allowed to go home for lunch.

A PBWCC spokesman told the media that bus owners had refused to increase wages despite three bus fare hikes since 2011. He said sector-wide indefinite strikes could be organised if bus owners refused to accept workers' demands.

Indonesian food-processing workers attacked by riot police

At least 20 striking workers of food packaging company PT Indofood CKA, in Jakarta, were seriously injured on July 2 when the company contracted Indonesia's elite riot police, known as the "Brimob Brigade," to attack over 500 striking employees. The workers were demanding collective bargaining through the Federation of Indonesian Metal Workers Union (FSPMI).

The food-processing workers have been on strike since March 11, following four months of management refusals to enter wage negotiations. They want their base pay increased by \$US39 per month, in line with the new minimum wage level passed last December by the local Purwakarta government. In December, the company dismissed 450 contract workers seeking permanent employment. The company currently employs 890 factory workers, 539 are members of the FSPMI.

South Korean truck drivers strike

Thousands of unionised truck drivers across South Korea staged a one-day strike on July 14 to demand that parliament pass a bill to improve the working conditions of 380,000 cargo transportation workers. According to a truckers' union official, the bill was proposed in 2012. It calls for a fare increase, basic labour rights, including protecting ownership of truckers and their license plates, more trucks given toll discounts, and the tightening of surveillance on cargo overloading.

The truckers held several national stoppages in 2012 calling for standard freight charges, with the minimum calculated on delivery distance, and support for fuel prices and transport costs. While the 2012 strikes ended after trucking companies reached limited deals with the unions many issues remain unresolved.

Sacked TV broadcasting workers in Taiwan protest

Former dispatch (contract) workers of the national broadcaster Taiwan Broadcasting System (TBS) and supporters demonstrated outside a public meeting hosted between TBS and its viewers at the Zhongli Arts Hall in Jhongli City on July 12. The protest was in opposition to the sacking of six dispatch workers, after management promised to put all 157 of its dispatch workers on its payroll.

TBS defended its earlier practice of using contract dispatch workers to save on salary costs and employee welfare payments. The workers have filed a complaint with the Taipei City Department of Labour and appealed the decision with the TBS.

Suspended Cambodian garment workers protest

Over 1,000 Ocean Garment employees have been protesting outside their factory in Phnom Penh's Pur Senchey district to demand compensation for lost wages after the factory suspended its operations on May 24 following reduced demand from buyers. Some workers surrounded the factory director's home on July 12 to demand full payment of their wages.

The company originally offered just \$US15 a month, but later increased it to \$50. Only 60 workers took up the offer. Ocean Garment management ignored an Arbitration Council ruling last week ordering the company to pay its workers full salary during the factory closure. The Collective Union of Movement of Workers has organised protests outside the ministry of labour in Phnom Penh.

Public hospital workers in Western Australia strike

Over 650 workers from Sir Charles Gardiner Hospital and the Royal Perth Hospital in Western Australia's capital Perth walked off the job for four hours on July 15 and 17 respectively to demand an improved pay offer from the state Liberal Barnett government. The workers are members of the Health Services Union (HSU) and include radiographers, pharmacists, physiotherapists, medical clerks, speech therapists and other allied health workers. Their enterprise bargaining agreement expired on June 30.

The health workers have rejected the government's pay increase offer of 5.25 percent over two years, which is less than the state's 3.1 percent annual inflation rate. They want a 9 percent pay rise over two years in line with the offer made to doctors and nurses at public hospitals.

According to the HSU, rolling stoppages are set to continue with strike action planned next week at Armadale, Bentley and Fremantle Hospitals.

Western Australian public servants accept inferior wage deal

Under pressure from the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) and the Civil Service Association, Western Australian public servants voted to accept a less-than-inflation wage increase from the Barnett government. The union-negotiated deal, which affects over 40,000 public servants, consists of a 2.75 percent increase this year, followed by 2.5 percent in the two years after that. Union members had originally demanded annual 3.5 percent pay increases over three years.

A CPSU official told the media it was an inferior deal but cynically

claimed the union would fight for a better deal during the next round of negotiations. In recent weeks, the WA Salaries and Allowances Tribunal granted parliamentary backbenchers a 3.8 percent pay rise, handing all members of parliament a flat \$5,585-a-week increase.

Western Australian port workers vote to strike

Workers at the Esperance Port in Western Australia's south-east have voted to take strike action after a year of negotiations for a new enterprise bargaining agreement. Seventy percent of stevedores and 100 percent of maintenance workers voted in favour of protected industrial action, which can begin on July 19.

The port workers want a 4 percent wage increase and 2 percent income protection. They rejected the port's 'final' offer earlier this month. The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) told the media that lengthy discussions with Esperance Ports Sea and Land EPSL, which operates the facility, had resolved nothing.

New South Wales building-supply workers locked out

Twenty-four employees of Ausreo, which supplies concrete reinforcing products to the construction industry, have been locked out of their factory at Wetherill Park, a south-western suburb of Sydney, for three weeks after demanding wage parity with their interstate colleagues. They have been maintaining a daily protest outside the factory gates.

Most workers are level-four machine operators earning \$20 an hour. They want their hourly wage rate increased by \$3 and improved redundancy provisions. Ausreo has only offered a 3 percent "Christmas bonus" but paid at management's discretion.

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union representatives and management met for the first time in a fortnight on July 11 but there was no resolution to the dispute. The existing enterprise agreement expired in February.

Catholic school teachers in New South Wales strike

Catholic teachers from schools across the Illawarra, south of Sydney, gathered at Wollongong's Lang Park for a three-hour strike on July 17 over delays in negotiations for a new work agreement. Members of the Independent Education Union (IEU), including teachers and support staff, within the Wollongong diocese are currently in negotiation with the Catholic Commission for Employment Relations, which represents the Catholic Education Office (CEO).

The IEU has lodged over 30 claims nationwide. These include a pay increase, entitlements and classifications on par with government schools, and minimum 12-month contracts for staff. Negotiations began 18 months ago. The last agreement between the IEU and the CEO was signed in 2009. Thursday's strike follows four-hour stoppages in late June and early July in NSW and Tasmania.

Industrial action by Victorian dairy workers enters third week

Some 110 maintenance workers at six Murray Goulburn dairy-processing factories in Victoria stopped work for one hour at the end of each shift on July 17 as part of a state-wide dispute for a new enterprise bargaining agreement. The limited action follows a 24-hour stoppage on July 4 and the imposition of ongoing bans on overtime and attending callouts.

The protected industrial action follows six months of negotiations between the company and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and Electrical Trades Union (ETU). According to the AMWU, management made a pay increase offer below the current 2.8 percent Consumer Price Index, refused to employ more local apprentices, wants reduced redundancy entitlements and to establish separate wage arrangements for new recruits.

New Zealand pallet-manufacturing workers strike

Thirty-three workers at the Chep pallet plant in Christchurch, on New Zealand's South Island, walked off the job on July 10 in a dispute over wage parity with fellow workers at Chep's Wiri pallet plant in Auckland. Workers in Auckland are paid an average of \$2 an hour more.

A FIRST Union official said management falsely claimed that the cost of living in Christchurch was less than Auckland so wages should be lower. Chep is an Australian-based subsidiary of Brambles and has operated in New Zealand since 1974.



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